



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the combined initial and second to fifth reports of Sao Tome and Principe*

1. The Committee considered the combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Sao Tome and Principe at its 1973rd and 1974th meetings (see [CEDAW/C/SR.1973](#) and [CEDAW/C/SR.1974](#)), held on 10 May 2023. The list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group is contained in [CEDAW/C/STP/Q/1-5](#), and the responses of Sao Tome and Principe are contained in [CEDAW/C/STP/RQ/1-5](#).

A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports. It also appreciates the State party's written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group. It welcomes the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in writing in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party on its high level-delegation, which was headed by the Minister for Women's Rights, Maria Milagré de Pina Delgado. The delegation also included representatives of the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Women's Rights, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity, the Department for Social Protection, Solidarity and Family, the National Police, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Association of Women Lawyers of Sao Tome and Principe and the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre.

4. The present concluding observations contain concerns and recommendations adopted jointly by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the context of their reviews of the periodic reports of Sao Tome and Principe under their respective conventions. The joint concerns and recommendations relate to gender stereotypes (paras. 24 (c) and 25 (d)); harmful practices (paras. 26 and 27 (a)); gender-based violence against women and girls (paras. 28 (chapeau) (a), (b), (f) and 29 (chapeau), (a), (b), (d) and (f)); school dropout (paras. 38 and 39); and health of adolescent girls (paras. 44 and 45).

* Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-fifth session (8–26 May 2023).



B. Positive aspects

5. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the entry into force of the Convention for Sao Tome and Principe in 2003 in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

- (a) Act No. 11/2022, on gender parity;
- (b) Decree-Law No. 7/2020, authorizing the payment of up to 85 per cent of the “global value” of the salaries of private sector workers through the Resilience Fund in order to prevent mass layoffs of private sector workers, including women;
- (c) Act No. 6/2019, on the Labour Code, which prohibits all forms of discrimination based on sex;
- (d) Act No. 19/2018, on the Family Code, which stipulates that marriage is based on the equal rights and duties of both spouses;
- (e) Act No. 6/2012, on the Criminal Code, which criminalizes trafficking in persons, including women and children, for purposes of sexual exploitation and child pornography;
- (f) Act No. 11/2008, on domestic and family violence;
- (g) Act No. 12/2008, on mechanisms to strengthen the legal protection of victims of domestic violence and offences;
- (h) Decree-Law No. 14/2007, on implementing the National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity.

6. The Committee welcomes the State party’s efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption or establishment of the following:

- (a) Third National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity, 2019–2026;
- (b) National Financial Inclusion Strategy, 2021–2025.

7. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the entry into force in 2003 of the Convention for Sao Tome and Principe, the State party has ratified or acceded to the following international and regional instruments:

- (a) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in 2017;
- (b) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in 2017;
- (c) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, in 2017;
- (d) International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, in 2017;
- (e) International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, in 2017;
- (f) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2015;
- (g) Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), in 2019.

C. Sustainable Development Goals

8. The Committee welcomes the international support for the Sustainable Development Goals and calls for the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalls the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination throughout all 17 Goals. It urges the State party to recognize women as the driving force of the sustainable development of the State party and to adopt relevant policies and strategies to that effect.

D. Parliament

9. The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see [A/65/38](#), part two, annex VI). It invites the National Assembly, in line with its mandate, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the submission of the next periodic report under the Convention.

E. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

Visibility of the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations

10. The Committee welcomes the indication in the State party report that it has conducted training and disseminated information on women's rights. It is concerned, however, at the lack of information on the number of such activities, their attendance or coverage as well as their impact. The Committee also notes with concern the limited awareness among women and girls, especially rural women and girls, of their human rights under the Convention and the remedies available to claim them at the domestic level and under the Optional Protocol.

11. **The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen awareness-raising efforts among women and girls and men and boys, on women's and girls' human rights and gender equality, with particular attention to rural areas. In addition, it recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **In cooperation with the media, raise awareness, particularly among women and girls, including in rural areas, of human rights under the Convention and the remedies available to claim such rights in the domestic courts and under the Optional Protocol;**
- (b) **Include information on the Convention, the Optional Protocol and the Committee's general recommendations and concluding observations in the professional training of members of the judiciary, law enforcement officials, medical professionals, teachers and social workers.**

Harmonization of laws

12. The Committee notes that, according to article 13 of the State party's Constitution, international treaties that have been ratified and published must be incorporated into the domestic legal system. It also notes that the State party is currently reviewing its legislation to align it with the Convention. The Committee

regrets, however, that several articles of the Convention have not yet been incorporated into national legislation.

13. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Accelerate its legislative review to bring its legislation fully in line with the Convention and consider availing itself of technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) if necessary;
- (b) Fully incorporate all rights enshrined in the Convention into its domestic legislation.

Definition of discrimination against women

14. The Committee notes with appreciation that article 15 of the State party's Constitution guarantees equality of women and men and that discrimination based on sex is prohibited in several laws. It regrets, however, the absence in the State party's legislation of a definition of discrimination against women covering both direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention.

15. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt anti-discrimination legislation that includes a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention.

Women's access to justice

16. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the State party to strengthen access to justice for women who are victims of gender-based violence, including through the provision of free legal aid. It notes with concern, however:

- (a) The absence of free legal aid for women to claim rights violations unrelated to gender-based violence;
- (b) The lack of awareness among women and girls of their rights and the remedies available to claim them and underreporting of rights violations by women in the State party;
- (c) The priority given to mediation over prosecution in cases of domestic violence, especially in rural areas, facilitated by the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre, the National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity, Committee IV of the National Assembly and non-governmental organizations, and the lack of legal safeguards to ensure that mediation does not place women at a disadvantage or at risk.

17. The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice and recommends that the State party:

- (a) Provide legal aid to all women without sufficient means, including in cases of rights violations other than gender-based violence, and ensure that eligibility for legal aid is based on women's real income or disposable assets rather than the family income, to which women may not have access;
- (b) Disseminate materials with information in accessible and easy-to-read formats on the legal remedies available to women and girls to claim their rights and their eligibility to receive legal aid, including free of charge, if necessary;

(c) **Adopt legal and other safeguards to ensure that women have a realistic choice between the use of legal proceedings or mediation and that the use of mediation does not place women at a disadvantage or at risk, especially in cases of domestic violence.**

National machinery for the advancement of women

18. The Committee welcomes the fact that the State party is integrating a gender perspective into all measures related to the Sustainable Development Goals. It also notes the different bodies working on women's rights and gender equality, notably, the National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity, the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre, Committee IV of the National Assembly, the National Commission on Population and Gender, and the Ministry of Women's Rights, and that the State party has adopted a National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity for 2019–2026. The Committee notes with concern, however, that the lack of coordination between these bodies may lead to duplication, gaps and ineffective use of resources and hamper the State party's efforts to address discrimination against women. It also notes with concern that the human, technical and financial resources of the Ministry of Women's Rights are insufficient for it to effectively implement its mandate.

19. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Reprioritize its budgetary allocation to ensure that the human, technical and financial resources of the Ministry of Women's Rights are adequate and enable it to effectively implement its mandate on women's rights and gender equality;**

(b) **Enhance coordination among the different entities of the national machinery for the advancement of women, ensure a clear division of tasks, define priorities and cooperation areas, and provide those entities with adequate human, technical and financial resources to advance women's rights and gender equality throughout the State party, especially in rural and remote areas, including through the effective implementation of the present concluding observations;**

(c) **Ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed and gender-responsive budgeting and other gender integration tools are introduced across all government departments.**

National human rights institution

20. The Committee notes the establishment of the Intersectoral Committee on Human Rights and the Office of Human Rights within the Ministry of Justice. It regrets, however, that the State party has not yet established a national human rights institution in line with the principles relating to the status of national human rights institutions (the Paris Principles).

21. The Committee recommends that the State party, as a matter of priority, establish an independent national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles, equip it with adequate human, technical and financial resources, and ensure that it has a strong mandate for the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality, and consider seeking technical assistance and advice from OHCHR to support that process, as appropriate.

Temporary special measures

22. The Committee notes that the State party has taken general measures to increase women's participation in economic, political and social life, including measures in

response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It notes with concern, however, the limited understanding among State party officials of temporary special measures, as defined in article 4 (1), of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures and their application in line with the Convention. The Committee appreciates the State party's capacity to address problems in society by adopting temporary special measures to accelerate substantive equality of women and men in all areas where women are disadvantaged or underrepresented.

23. The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures and recommends that the State party raise awareness about the non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention, train relevant public officials in the design and application of such measures, and adopt temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality of women and men in all areas where women are disadvantaged or underrepresented in the State party.

Gender stereotypes

24. The Committee notes with concern the persistence of deep-rooted gender stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, as well as of patriarchal attitudes in the State party. In particular, it notes with concern:

- (a) The relegation of women to stereotypical child-rearing and caregiving roles, denial of their right to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children, and that many men have multiple partners and abandon the mothers of their children;
- (b) The social acceptance, including by women themselves, of stereotyped roles and patriarchal attitudes that give rise to gender-based violence against women;
- (c) The prevalence of gender stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of girls and boys in the family and in society, which are reinforced in the education system of the State party and within families, and that the prevalence of gender stereotypes frequently results in the disproportionate allocation of stereotyped domestic tasks to girls;

25. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) **Raise awareness about the discriminatory nature and harmful effects of stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, and the need to eliminate such stereotypes, and foster understanding of women's and men's equal capacities;**
- (b) **Promote equal sharing of domestic responsibilities between women and men, including by introducing paid paternal leave or shared parental leave;**
- (c) **Conduct awareness-raising campaigns, highlighting men's full responsibility for their children and the harmful effects of abandonment on mothers and their children;**
- (d) **Develop a comprehensive strategy to address gender stereotypes affecting girls, including at all levels of the education system, and promote the equal sharing of roles and responsibilities between girls and boys and women and men.**

Harmful practices

26. The Committee is concerned about the persistence of harmful practices in the State party, including child marriage and de facto unions, often between girls and older men.

27. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Conduct awareness-raising campaigns and take other measures to effectively address harmful practices and social norms, in particular those justifying child marriage, early pregnancy and domestic and sexual violence, including through a comprehensive behaviour-change strategy, involving, inter alia, relevant professionals, traditional leaders and the media;**

(b) **Establish mechanisms to detect, protect and provide necessary services and support to victims of child and forced marriage and de facto unions, criminalize child and forced marriage and de facto unions, ensuring that children involved are not criminalized, strengthen its efforts to prevent and combat these harmful practices and ensure the prosecution of those responsible, in line with joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) on harmful practices and target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Gender-based violence against women and girls

28. The Committee welcomes the measures taken to address gender-based violence against women and girls, including the adoption of Act No. 11/2008, on domestic and family violence, and Act No. 12/2008, on mechanisms to strengthen the legal protection of victims of domestic violence and offences. The Committee is concerned, however, that those laws are not being adequately implemented, are focused only on domestic violence rather than all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, and are not fully in line with international standards. The Committee notes with concern that women and girls are frequently subjected to various forms of gender-based violence in the State party, including, increasingly, domestic and sexual violence and abuse, including within the family, and that a significant number of early pregnancies are caused by rape. The Committee also notes with concern:

(a) The persistence of patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes among adults and adolescents seeking to condone intimate partner violence;

(b) The growing phenomenon of sexual abuse of girls in exchange for better grades or other benefits (referred to as *catorzinhas/papoite*), which sometimes results in early pregnancy and is not prosecuted as sexual abuse in the State party;

(c) The lack of professional training for members of the judiciary and law enforcement officials on gender-sensitive protocols for handling cases of gender-based violence against women and girls;

(d) The inadequate resources allocated to preventing and addressing gender-based violence against women and girls, limited access to legal aid for victims of domestic violence, the lack of adequate shelters, especially for victims of domestic violence, whose stay is limited to 72 hours, and the lack of victim support services, in particular for women belonging to ethnic minorities and women with disabilities;

(e) Reports of gender-based violence against older women accused of witchcraft;

(f) The absence of a data-collection system to systematically compile disaggregated data on gender-based violence against women and girls.

29. The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, and recommends that the State party significantly strengthen its efforts to prevent gender-based violence against women and girls, in close consultation with experts on the prevention of gender-based violence, and take a women's and girls' rights-centred approach to such efforts, including by focusing on eliminating all forms of gender-based violence at school at all levels of education, and training teachers accordingly, and by conducting media campaigns challenging stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, with a view to eliminating all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, addressing aggressive behaviour and raising awareness of the available remedies and support for survivors/victims. It also recommends that the State party:

- (a) Bring its legislation on gender-based violence fully in line with international standards and ensure its effective implementation, and update the national strategy to combat gender-based violence, 2013–2018;
- (b) Fully criminalize the sexual abuse of girls by men in exchange for better grades or other benefits, and prevent and combat the practice, in particular in schools, including by establishing guidelines on preventing and combating sexual harassment and violence at school, set up an effective monitoring and reporting mechanism, and ensure that all cases of sexual abuse of girls are investigated and prosecuted as such and girls are provided with the necessary assistance and psychosocial support, in particular to continue schooling;
- (c) Provide systematic, recurrent and effective capacity-building, education and training for members of the judiciary and law enforcement, and encourage reporting of gender-based violence against women, including by establishing special gender-responsive units in police stations to register women's complaints;
- (d) Reprioritize resources to strengthen victim support services, including by ensuring a sufficient number of adequately funded emergency shelters that provide legal, medical and psychosocial assistance to victims of gender-based violence and their children, including to victims of domestic violence, and that they allow for stays beyond 72 hours, incorporating a victim- and women's and girls' rights-centred approach, with a particular focus on rural women and girls and those belonging to disadvantaged groups;
- (e) Criminalize the accusing of women of practising witchcraft, and prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators as well as those that commit gender-based violence against women accused of witchcraft;
- (f) Set up a system of data collection in order to compile statistical data on gender-based violence against women and girls, disaggregated by age and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

30. The Committee welcomes the 2012 amendment to the Criminal Code that criminalizes trafficking in persons for purposes of sexual exploitation and child pornography. It also notes that the State party has conducted awareness-raising campaigns on the criminal nature of trafficking in persons and at-risk situations for trafficking, including in rural and remote areas. The Committee notes with concern, however, that there is very little awareness of the incidence of trafficking in women and children, including girls, for purposes of sex tourism, and that, accordingly, the prevention of trafficking and identification of risk factors, victims and perpetrators

are not sufficiently prioritized in the State party. The Committee also notes with concern:

- (a) The lack of a coordination body and of a national action plan to combat trafficking;
- (b) The lack of training for members of the judiciary and law enforcement officials on the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation, including the early identification of victims of trafficking and their referral to appropriate services;
- (c) That extreme poverty drives families in rural areas to send their children, including girls, to live with wealthy relatives so that they can gain access to quality education in exchange for light domestic duties, which often gives rise to labour and/or sexual exploitation and thus amounts to trafficking;
- (d) The risk of children, including girls, becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation and the worst forms of child labour;
- (e) The lack of any data-collection system on trafficking in persons.

31. **The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration and recommends that the State party:**

- (a) Establish a centralized coordination body and adopt a national action plan on trafficking in persons;
- (b) Provide systematic capacity-building to members of the judiciary and law enforcement officials on the early identification of victims of trafficking and their referral to appropriate services;
- (c) Ensure that all perpetrators of trafficking in persons and their accomplices are prosecuted and adequately punished;
- (d) Criminalize the purchase, pimping and procuring of sexual services from persons under the age of 18, while ensuring that the person providing the sexual services is not criminalized;
- (e) Strengthen awareness-raising campaigns to prevent internal and cross-border trafficking in women and children, including girls, and provide confidential reporting mechanisms;
- (f) Set up protection, rehabilitation and support services for children exploited by their relatives;
- (g) Ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data on trafficking in persons, disaggregated by age, sex, nationality of victims and forms of trafficking.

Equal participation in political and public life

32. The Committee welcomes the adoption by the State party of Act No. 11/2022, on gender parity, which establishes a minimum quota of 40 per cent for women's representation in elected bodies and in the public service, as well as the previous resolution establishing a 30 per cent quota for women's representation in the National Assembly. It notes with concern, however, that women currently hold only 8 out of 55 seats in the National Assembly and that their representation in the public service and the judiciary remains very low.

33. **The Committee recommends that the State party effectively implement the minimum quota for women's representation in elected bodies and in the public service stipulated in the gender parity act of 2022. It also recommends that the**

State party create a level playing field for women candidates in elections, including to public office, by providing training to women on political campaigning, leadership skills and campaign financing, and conducting awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women to run for elections, foster societal support for women in leadership positions, dismantle gender stereotypes, and promote understanding that women's equal representation in decision-making systems and on international bodies is a human right and necessary to ensuring that women can fully exercise their human rights and to achieving political stability and sustainable development in the State party.

Nationality

34. The Committee notes with concern that women nationals of the State party cannot automatically transmit their nationality to their children born outside the State party. It is also concerned that the State party has not yet ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

35. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Make the necessary legal amendments to allow for the automatic transfer of nationality from mothers to their children, regardless of where a child is born;**
- (b) Speedily ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.**

Education

36. The Committee welcomes the high priority given to the provision of education in the State party. However, the Committee notes with concern:

- (a) That approximately 20 per cent of secondary school age girls do not attend school, in particular rural girls and girls from economically disadvantaged families;**
- (b) The poor school infrastructure in the State party, including inadequate water and sanitation and lack of menstrual hygiene products and facilities;**
- (c) High illiteracy rates among women, in particular rural women, and the lack of literacy campaigns for women;**
- (d) The low representation of girls in technical and vocational training programmes, which limits their employment opportunities and economic independence as adults.**

37. Recalling its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, the Committee recommends that the State party promote the importance of girls' education at all levels as a basis for their empowerment, and:

- (a) Increase girls' access to quality education, in particular at the secondary level and in rural and remote areas, including by increasing the number of schools and providing free and safe school transportation;**
- (b) Ensure access for girls to adequate water and sanitation, sex-segregated restrooms and menstrual hygiene products and facilities at schools;**
- (c) Carry out adult literacy programmes for women, particularly targeting rural women;**
- (d) Analyse and identify the barriers that girls face in accessing technical and vocational training and tertiary education, and adopt targeted measures,**

such as awareness-raising and special scholarships and quotas for female students, to increase their participation in such training and education, as well as non-traditional fields of study, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and information and communications technology, and related career paths.

School dropout

38. The Committee is seriously concerned about the high rates of school dropout, in particular among girls, as a result early pregnancy and upon transition to the upper secondary level.

39. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Assess the causes of school dropout among girls, to inform a strategic approach to address those causes and to improve access to education for girls belonging to disadvantaged groups;**
- (b) **Ensure that girls remain in and finish school, including by promoting the value of learning, providing incentives for school attendance, addressing gender stereotypes regarding access to education for girls, taking measures to prevent child marriage and early pregnancy and supporting young mothers to return to and finish school, including to provide them with better access to economic empowerment and employment opportunities.**

Employment

40. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the new Labour Code in 2019, which provides for equal opportunities for women and men in the choice of professions and equal working conditions. The Committee notes with concern, however:

- (a) The persistence of gender stereotypes hampering women's access to employment in the State party;
- (b) The disproportionately high unemployment rates among women, in particular young women, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in many women's economic dependency and poverty at old age;
- (c) The overrepresentation of women in unpaid work, in particular domestic work, and the informal economy, without access to social protection and pension benefits;
- (d) Reports of sexual harassment in the workplace;
- (e) That the prohibition in the Labour Code of certain occupations for pregnant, post-partum and breastfeeding women may restrict women's equal right to employment.

41. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Increase women's access to employment in the formal economy, including by dismantling gender stereotypes concerning traditional roles of women, conduct awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality targeting employers, provide incentives to hire women and adopt temporary special measures, such as quotas, to promote women's equal participation in the labour market;**
- (b) **Extend social protection to women working in the informal economy and women performing domestic and other unpaid work, with special attention to rural women;**

- (c) **Criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and ensure that victims have access to independent and confidential complaint procedures, those responsible are adequately punished and victims are protected from retaliation;**
- (d) **Amend the Labour Code to remove any restrictions concerning prohibited occupations for pregnant, post-partum and breastfeeding mothers;**
- (e) **Conduct impact assessments of the implementation of new laws and policies aimed at eliminating all discrimination in the work environment and ensure that they are in full compliance with the Convention and international standards, in practice and throughout its territory.**

Health

42. The Committee notes with concern the disparities in women's access to health services in the State party, based on socioeconomic status, place of residence and educational level, and that rural women are especially disadvantaged. It also notes with concern:

- (a) The lack of sexual and reproductive health services, in particular prenatal, perinatal and post-partum services, given the high fertility rates in the State party, where the average rate is 4.3 births per woman;
- (b) The low level of contraception use and lack of detailed information on the outreach activities of the national sexual and reproductive health programme.

43. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Strengthen women's access to quality health services and eliminate disparities, in particular for rural women, including by improving the health-care infrastructure, increasing budgetary allocations for the health sector and conducting informational campaigns on women's health;**
- (b) **Widely disseminate information on and strengthen women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, including skilled birth attendance, prenatal and post-partum care, as well as modern forms of contraception and safe abortion and post-abortion services, with particular attention to rural women, and increase the outreach of the national sexual and reproductive health programme.**

Health of adolescent girls

44. The Committee is concerned about the following:

- (a) The alarmingly high rates of early pregnancy, particularly among girls belonging to disadvantaged groups and in the Autonomous Region of Principe, exposing girls to an increased risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, resulting, *inter alia*, in school dropout and an increased risk of economic destitution and dependence;
- (b) The insufficient provision of sexual and reproductive health education in schools and sociocultural barriers preventing the use of contraceptives;
- (c) The increased incidence of HIV and AIDS, in particular among adolescent girls who engage in sexual activity before 16 years of age;
- (d) The lack of possibilities for girls to manage menstruation hygienically and safely, which exposes them to stigma and social exclusion.

45. Recalling target 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) On the basis of an evaluation of the national youth policy strategy and the action plan for the prevention of early pregnancy, 2018–2022, develop an age-appropriate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents and strengthen sexual and reproductive health education, including by ensuring the mandatory provision of such education and that it is focused on the prevention of early pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and AIDS, and by promoting responsible sexual behaviour in school curricula at all levels;
- (b) Address the root causes of early pregnancy, including socioeconomic vulnerability, limited access to education and sexual violence, and ensure that adolescents have knowledge of and access to modern contraceptives, safe abortion services and confidential HIV testing and treatment, including through information campaigns and other targeted measures addressing the relevant sociocultural barriers;
- (c) Develop and implement a policy to protect the rights of pregnant girls, adolescent mothers and their children, combat discrimination against them and ensure school retention and reinsertion for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers, with a view to completion;
- (d) To prevent school absenteeism and dropout among girls owing to menstruation, ensure that girls have access to menstrual hygiene items, including free of charge, if needed, that every school has adequate gender-separated sanitary facilities for girls and conduct awareness-raising activities in schools and among the general public to ensure that menstruation is not considered a social taboo and that girls are not exposed to any form of stigma or menstruation-related discrimination.

Economic empowerment

46. The Committee welcomes the National Financial Inclusion Strategy, which includes women as a target group. It also notes the availability of micro credits for women in the State party. It is concerned, however, that more than 50 per cent of women do not have access to financial credit. It further notes with concern:

- (a) That women have been disproportionately affected by the adverse economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of information from the State party on the integration of a gender perspective into the post-COVID-19 development plan and policy and similar mitigation strategies;
- (b) The lack of information on the involvement of women in the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and on the gender impact of the Agreement in respect of women in the State party.

47. The Committee recommends that the State party support women's economic empowerment and ensure that the National Financial Inclusion Strategy incorporates a comprehensive gender perspective and is implemented accordingly. It also recommends that the State party:

- (a) Expand women's access to financial credit by providing relevant information to them in different media, and by providing women, in particular rural women, with access to low-interest loans without collateral, as well as entrepreneurship opportunities, including to start independent businesses and gain access to affirmative procurement programmes, and information and

communications technology, and by creating an infrastructure that enables women to access markets, including e-commerce;

(b) Ensure that post-COVID-19 recovery policies and programmes include a gender perspective, women participate equally in the design, adoption and implementation of such policies, and women and their children who have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic have adequate access to social benefits;

(c) Increase the involvement and leadership of women in implementing the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and ensure that the Agreement is implemented in a gender-responsive manner that equally benefits women and men and supports women's economic empowerment.

Rural women

48. The Committee acknowledges the State party's recognition of the problems faced by rural women and the steps it has taken to improve their access to basic services and social protection. It notes with concern, however, that rural women and girls have very limited access to education, health services and transportation and that they are largely relegated to traditional caretaking responsibilities. The Committee also notes with concern:

(a) Rural women's limited access to land ownership and use and that, in cases of joint ownership by married couples, land parcels are often registered only under the husband's name;

(b) The disproportionate burden on rural women to fetch water and wood and provide food for their families, which exposes them to the effects of climate change and the degradation of natural resources;

(c) The lack of information on women's participation in decision-making on the development of renewable energies, activities related to the sustainable use of the ocean, known as the "blue economy", the implementation of sustainable agroforestry models and the development and implementation of the oil revenue management law.

49. **The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, and recommends that the State party:**

(a) Improve women's access to basic services, such as health care, transportation and education, and adequate water and sanitation facilities in rural areas;

(b) Promote equal sharing between rural women and men of responsibilities for traditional caretaking responsibilities, including the procurement of water, wood and food;

(c) Ensure rural women's access to land ownership and use and that jointly owned land parcels are registered under the names of both spouses;

(d) Ensure that women participate equally in decision-making on climate change mitigation measures and the sustainable management of natural resources;

(e) Identify the impact of the extractive oil industry on rural women and how possible risks could be mitigated and incorporate the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants of 2004 and the Minamata Convention on Mercury of 2017 into national legislation regulating the oil sector.

Disadvantaged groups of women

Women living in poverty

50. The Committee notes with concern that women, in particular women heads of households and their families and unemployed women, are disproportionately affected by poverty in the State party.

51. The Committee recommends that the State party develop and adopt a poverty reduction strategy incorporating a gender perspective and with a particular focus on women, especially women heads of households and unemployed women, and ensure that women participate in the design, adoption and implementation of the strategy, including at decision-making levels.

Marriage and family relations

52. The Committee commends the State party on the updated Family Code, which was developed on the basis of the fundamental principles of equality between men and women in the family, where “spouses are mutually bound by the duties of respect, loyalty, cohabitation, cooperation and assistance” and share the burdens of family life. The Committee notes with concern, however, that:

- (a) Women in families, including girls in marriages and de facto unions and women heads of household, bear a heavy burden of housework, child care and other family-related care work;
- (b) Many fathers do not respect court orders to provide child support payments in the State party;
- (c) The limited economic protection afforded to women upon dissolution of a union by the law that formalizes and protects the rights of partners in de facto unions.

53. The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 29 (2013) on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution, and recommends that the State party:

- (a) **Develop programmes that educate women and girls and men and boys, including fathers and mothers in urban and rural areas, on the Family Code and that prepare them for shared family responsibility, care work and equality in family relations;**
- (b) **Ensure the enforcement of court decisions on child support payments and advance child support payments in cases where they cannot be collected from a father;**
- (c) **Amend the law formalizing and protecting the rights of partners in de facto unions to ensure that women have adequate economic protection upon dissolution of a union.**

Data collection and analysis

54. The Committee is concerned about the absence of data collection in many areas relevant to the implementation of the Convention.

55. The Committee recommends that the State party promote and build capacity for the collection of statistical data, including on the prevalence of gender-based violence, the prevalence of trafficking in persons, access to education and women’s socioeconomic status, disaggregated by sex, age and socioeconomic background, for purposes of planning and for the design and implementation of tailored and gender-sensitive legislation, policies, programmes and budgets.

Amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention

56. The Committee encourages the State party to accept, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

57. The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to further evaluate the realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention in order to achieve substantive equality between women and men.

Dissemination

58. The Committee requests the State party to ensure the timely dissemination of the present concluding observations, in the official language of the State party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the Government, the National Assembly and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.

Technical assistance

59. The Committee recommends that the State party link the implementation of the Convention to its development efforts and that it avail itself of regional or international technical assistance in this respect.

Ratification of other treaties

60. The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments¹ would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State party to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which it is not yet a party.

Follow-up to concluding observations

61. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 21, 25 (d), 27 (b) and 55 above.

Preparation of the next report

62. The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the sixth periodic report of the State party in line with a future predictable reporting calendar based on an eight-year review cycle and following the adoption of a list of issues and questions prior to reporting, if applicable, for the State party. The report should cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.

¹ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

63. The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents (HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6, chap. I).
